



Connecticut Food System Alliance

Environment Committee Public Hearing 03/07/2022 RE: SB 243: An Act Concerning Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Cohen and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. Harding, and members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 243, An Act Concerning Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices. My name is Meg Hourigan, I am a resident of New Britain, and I coordinate the Connecticut Food System Alliance. The Connecticut Food System Alliance is a statewide network of dedicated stakeholders committed to creating broad systems change and advancing a sustainable, equitable food system in Connecticut.

SB 243 would expand the Farmland Restoration Grant Program to fund climate resiliency efforts, enabling the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to pay/reimburse farmers practicing “Climate-Smart Agricultural and Forestry Practices” as defined by the US Department of Agriculture. It would prioritize funding for marginalized farmers and beginning farmers. It would also expand the program to pay for technical assistance and other innovations to support farmers.

The time for climate change prevention has passed; the time for climate change preparation has passed; efforts must now focus on adapting to and slowing climate change. Farmers across the political spectrum acknowledge how the weather has changed over their careers. Over the past few years, multiple devastating weather events have ruined massive swaths of Connecticut farmers’ crops, requiring aid from state and federal government. While this safety net needs to remain in place, we must do more than react to the damage of climate change. Connecticut’s \$5 billion agricultural sector is poised to be a positive force for climate change mitigation if we implement sound, supportive policy like SB 243.

SB 243 would strengthen our local food system, reduce the impacts of climate change, and support Connecticut farmers, who increasingly struggle to make ends meet. We especially need to expand opportunities for farmers who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC). Connecticut has some of the highest farmland prices and one of the largest racial wealth gaps in the country. These are just two of many factors that compound on each other to shape a food system that excludes and exploits BIPOC. Prioritizing BIPOC for funding through the Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency Grant Program is one way to address this inequity while making the food system more resilient.

Climate legislation may carry a high price tag; failing to meaningfully address climate change carries a much higher price tag.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 243. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Meg Hourigan
Coordinator, Connecticut Food System Alliance